

The Courier Café

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For over 25 years the Courier Café has been the gathering place of many people in Urbana. It has a wide range of delicious foods that everyone can enjoy. The restaurant itself carries a character of its own, which makes it stand out a little more from all the other restaurants. You can also learn a little when you are there because the building and location have a very interesting history.

The Courier Café is located on a spot that has a rich history. The first building in what is now known as Urbana was built on the exact location of the Courier Café. In 1873 the first structure was built there and it was a simple little house. Then in 1916 a new building was built that became the place where *The Courier* newspaper operated. It was a local newspaper serving about 35,000 people. A fire in the early 1950s almost burned down the building, but the newspaper owners managed to build it back up. In 1979 the newspaper closed, and a year later the building was transformed into the Courier Café.

Allen Strong bought the building in 1980. He restored it and saved as much of the original building and design as possible. One of the reasons he kept the original design was because he owned lots of antiques from the time period when the building was built and thought it would be a good place to display them. The café opened on July 7, 1980. The business was a great success until the issue came up of the restaurant being a place that allowed its costumers to smoke. Lots of conflicts resulted between the smokers and the non-smokers; so Strong had to decide if he wanted to lose some of his

smoking customers or some of his non-smoking customers. In 2003 he finally made the decision to make Courier Café a smoke free restaurant. This decision proved to be a big success. One factor that played a big part in helping him make this decision was that he owned another restaurant that had always been smoke free and it still had great business.

The menu at the Courier Café takes on the same effect as the building. There is a historical side to the menu just like the building and the antiques inside. The menu plays along with the old fashioned aspect of the restaurant. It has a nice design bordering it and it also twisted around the text in an interesting way. It is definitely not something that was designed a couple years ago. The names of some of the foods, especially the burgers, also have a historical, local twist. Some of them have names that have to do with the old newspaper company that was located in the building like “The Headliner” and “The Paperboy.” Some of the other names of the foods have a local Urbana feeling like “The Race in Burger” and “The Main Street Cheeseburger” because Race Street and a Main Street in downtown Urbana are not far from the restaurant. It is also historical and old in the sense that the menu really has not changed from the very first copy of it to the copy used today. Compare the original copy to the newest copy; they are almost the same word for word. The only things that have really changed are the prices and the design from the first menu to the second.

In conclusion, this long-standing building is packed with interesting details that you cannot find in a newer restaurant. It has had a rich history and well earned reputation. It is also unique because even though it looks very old fashioned, the restaurant is open to new ideas like being smoke free. Eating at the Courier Café is an experience one will not easily forget. [From "Courier Cafe Menu," Courier Cafe Menu, 1981, 2005; "Courier

history," Courier Silvercreek. <http://www.couriersilvercreek.com> (Nov. 21, 2005); Nick Rogers, "Restaurant Spotlight," Time Out, Oct. 5, 2001; *The Champaign Urbana News-Gazette*, Jan. 2003.]